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ABSTRACT

Getting Alternative Information Now (GAIN) is a family-based program designed to prevent/reduce drug and alcohol use/abuse among teenagers and families. The program includes: (1) referrals by school systems to the Family Services Agency of Central Arkansas; (2) clinical needs assessments to determine which program (Early Intervention Program, Intermediate Intervention Program, or referral to another program) is most appropriate; and (3) a series of five to six 2-hour classes focusing on drug and alcohol use, refusal efficacy skills, family communications and rules, high risk behaviors, and positive, alternative activities. There were a total of 168 urban families with children in grades 6 through 12. This evaluation compared the two program groups with equivalent control groups. Three different types of school suspension policies (strict, moderate, lenient) were compared to determine if they had an effect on drug and alcohol related behavior by school policy. The GAIN program was most effective in reducing school-reported disciplinary problems. Areas in which there was no program-related change included non-drug related school problems and grade point averages. The program was equally effective in producing positive change regardless of school policy. Schools might consider implementing a drug-related policy associated with a drug-education program if they do not already have one. No recommendation advocating one school policy over another can be made. (ABL)

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GAIN and School Behaviors:
A Family-Focused Drug-Education Program

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GAIN and School Behavior: A Family-Focused Drug-Education Program

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Abstract

Getting Alternative Information Now is a family-based program designed to prevent/reduce drug and alcohol use/abuse among teens and families. The program includes school referrals to the Agency, clinical assessments to determine program appropriateness, and a series of five to six two-hour classes focusing on drug and alcohol use, refusal self-efficacy skills, family communications and rules, high-risk behaviors, and positive, alternative activities. Positive changes included reductions in the following: percent days absent during grading period, number drug-related suspensions, total number drug-related problems at school, and number days suspended.

Introduction

The *Getting Alternative Information Now* (GAIN) program is a family-based prevention education and intervention program designed to prevent and/or reduce the incidence of drug and alcohol abuse among teens and their families. The program design includes referrals by school systems to the Family Services Agency of Central Arkansas (FSA), clinical needs assessments to determine which program--the Early Intervention Program (EIP), the Intermediate Intervention Program, or a referral to another program--is most appropriate, and a series of five to six two-hour classes focusing on drug and alcohol use, refusal self-efficacy skills, family communications and rules, high-risk behaviors, and positive, alternative activities.

The GAIN evaluation compared the two program groups with equivalent control groups. In addition to reviewing the overall program effectiveness, this evaluation compared three different types of school suspension policies to determine if they had an effect on drug and alcohol related behavior by school policy. The three drug and alcohol suspension policies reviewed are as follows:

1. Mandatory suspension with threat of expulsion ("Strict" policy): Students who are found to be in possession of any drugs or alcohol are given a mandatory suspension and are required to attend and complete a drug/alcohol prevention/intervention program. If the program is not completed, the student is expelled from school.

2. Mandatory suspension ("Moderate" policy): Students who are found to be in possession of drugs or alcohol are given a mandatory suspension and are required to attend and complete a drug/alcohol prevention/intervention program. If the program is not completed, expulsion may be recommended.

3. Partial waiver suspension ("Lenient" policy): Students who are found to be in possession of drugs or alcohol are given a suspension and are required to attend and complete a drug/alcohol prevention/intervention program. If the program is completed, the number of days suspended is reduced. If the program is not completed, the student must complete the entire suspension.

Sample

Experimental Group

Adolescent participants and their families were referred to the FSA through self-, court-, and school-referrals. Using a clinical assessment interview, Urban teens and their families were assigned to either the EIP or the Intermediate program.

Control Group

Control groups were matched to the Program groups at the school district level. FSA staff made contact with Urban school districts that were similar in population, geographic location, and racial/ethnic make-up. Students who were disciplined at a Control site school for a suspendable reason were referred to FSA for evaluation only. Urban Control families were then assigned to either the EIP or Intermediate Group using FSA's needs assessment criteria. Assignments were made based on the information parents, students, and school personnel provided via school records and survey profile data.

Procedure

Data were collected from the adolescent, guardian, and school at three points in time--prior to participating in the program (pretest), immediately following the program (posttest 1), and at follow-up five weeks later (posttest 2). Data on 1989-1990 school-year disciplinary problems, attendance, grades, and dropout/suspensions/expulsions were collected from school records.

All participants filled out a Profile Sheet and an Attitudinal and Behavioral Survey at pretest.² The Survey was completed at all three occasions. The Profile Sheet provides demographic data on the participants and their families. These data were used to describe the sample.

Analyses

Repeated Measures Multivariate Analysis of Variance were conducted separately by region (Urban and Rural) to examine differences in Group (Control v. Program) and Program Assignment (EIP v. Intermediate [Urban participants only]) across time.³ Age of teen was used as the covariate in the teen analyses. Differences in Group and Program were assessed across two occasions of time for teens. F tests of significance are

presented for these analyses. In addition, differences in school policies across all three occasions were separately assessed among the Urban Experimental schools, with each school system acting as a control for the other. Wald X^2 tests of significance are presented for these analyses.

School data were examined at pretest to determine if there were initial Group differences between responses on the scale and frequency variables. Most of this data showed significant differences between the Experimentals and Controls. Since baseline or pretest data must be similar between the Experimental and Control groups in order to determine if the program was effective, all school data were standardized within the two experimental groups. The standardized variables have a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10.

Variables assessed using this method included the following: Grade Point Average, Percent Days Absent, Number of Suspensions, Number of Drug-Related Suspensions, Number of Non-Drug-Related Suspensions, Number of Days Suspended, Number of Non-Suspendable Offenses, Number of Drug-Related Non-Suspendable Offenses, Number of Non-Drug-Related Non-Suspendable Offenses, Combined Number of Suspensions, Disciplines, and Expulsions, Combined Number of Drug-Related Suspensions, Disciplines, and Expulsions, and Combined Number of Non-Drug-Related Suspensions, Disciplines, and Expulsions.

Results

Sample Profile

There were a total of 168 urban families ($n = 65$ Experimental and 80 Control) who completed the program and successfully completed the profile data sheets. There were 52 (31.0%) female and 116 (69.0%) male adolescents in the sample. Broken down by race, there were 86 (51.2%) whites, 57 (33.9%) blacks, 1 (0.6%) other race, and 24 (14.3%) of unknown race. Grade in school ranged from 6th through 12th grades ($\bar{x} = 9.02$; $s = 1.88$). Family parental make-up was quite varied: 95 (56.5%) of the teens lived with both natural parents, 47 (28.0%) lived with mother and step-father, 40 (23.8%) lived with mother only, 10 (6.0%) lived with father and step-mother, 9 (5.4%) lived with a guardian, 6 (3.6%) lived with father only, and 44 (26.2%) lived in other types (i.e., with other adult relatives, alone, with a significant other, or unknown) of family arrangements.

Participants in the program were compared to the Control group to determine if there were any significant differences between the two groups. Data from the profile sheets were used to conduct this analysis. There were no differences between Experimental and Control groups in the number of siblings; the number of years the teen had lived with mother, step-father, step-mother, guardian, or other person; number of alcoholics or drug addicts in the family; or the number of surveys completed by the teen or the father.

Some significant profile differences between the Experimental and Control Groups were observed. Experimental teens were older and in a higher grade than Control teens. Therefore, age was used as a controlling variable. Experimental teens had lived longer with their fathers than have Controls, even when age was controlled. No other parental living differences were found.

Program Effectiveness Results

Data from the first two occasions were used for this set of analyses. Differences by occasion; experimental group; program assignment; occasion, experimental group, and program assignment crossed with each other; and age of teen were assessed. Data were standardized within experimental group since there were initial, significant differences between the two groups. The following presents results of dependent variables that had significant group outcome and program results.

School Attendance. There was a significant Group by Occasion effect in proportion of days absent from school during the grading period (See Figure 1). The proportion of days absent for the Experimental group went down while the proportion of days absent for the Control group went up, $F(1,143) = 4.90$; $p < .0284$. There were no significant Program or Age differences.

Insert Figure 1 About Here

Drug-Related Behaviors. There was a significant Group by Occasion effect in the number of drug-related suspensions, non-suspendable disciplines, plus expulsions (See Figure 2). The number of incidents

remained about the same from pretest to posttest for the Control group and dropped significantly for the Experimental group, $F(1,144) = 69.93$; $p < .0001$. In addition, there were also significant differences by Program, Age, and Occasion. Participants assigned to the Intermediate Program had more drug-related incidents than did participants assigned to the EIP Program, $F(1,143) = 10.48$; $p < .0015$. The number of incidents went down from pretest to posttest 1 for both experimental groups, $F(1,144) = 127.82$; $p < .0001$. And, as age increased, so did the number of reported drug-related behaviors at school, $F(1,143) = 8.02$; $p < .0053$.

Insert Figure 2 About Here

There was a significant Group by Occasion effect in the number of drug-related suspensions (See Figure 3). The number of incidents remained about the same from pretest to posttest for the Control group and dropped significantly for the Experimental group, $F(1,144) = 80.80$; $p < .0001$. There was also a significant interaction between program assignment and occasion. Regardless of participation in the program, participants in both EIP and Intermediate groups decreased from pretest to posttest; however, the decrease for the EIP group was greater than that of the Intermediate group, $F(1,144) = 6.93$; $p < .0094$. In addition, there were also significant differences by program assignment, age, and occasion. Participants assigned to the Intermediate Program had more drug-related suspensions than did participants assigned to the EIP Program, $F(1,143) = 10.42$; $p < .0015$. The number of incidents went down from pretest to posttest 1 for both experimental groups, $F(1,144) = 115.93$; $p < .0001$. And, as age increased, so did the number of reported drug-related suspensions, $F(1,143) = 4.27$; $p < .0407$.

Insert Figure 3 About Here

Non-Drug-Related Negative Behaviors. There was a significant Group by Occasion interaction in the number of non-drug-related suspensions, non-suspendable disciplines, and expulsions. There was no change in

the number of incidents from pretest to posttest for the Experimental Group; the number of incidents decreased from pretest to posttest among the Control group, $F(1,144) = 9.67$; $p < .0023$. However, this difference may not be practically significant since the unstandardized, mean number of incidents for the Experimental Group was essentially zero. There was an overall significant difference by occasion and age. The number of incidents decreased from pretest to posttest, $F(1,144) = 7.02$; $p < .0089$. Also, as age increased, the number of non-drug-related incidents decreased, $F(1,143) = 9.94$; $p < .002$. There were no significant differences by Program.

There was a significant Group by Occasion interaction in the number of non-drug-related suspensions. There was no change in the number of incidents from pretest to posttest for the Experimental Group; the number of incidents decreased from pretest to posttest among the Control group, $F(1,144) = 8.15$; $p < .005$. However, this difference may not be practically significant since the unstandardized, mean number of incidents for the Experimental Group was essentially zero. In addition, there were significant differences by Occasion and Age. The number of incidents decreased from pretest to posttest, $F(1,144) = 11.58$; $p < .0009$. Also, as age increased, the number of non-drug-related incidents decreased, $F(1,143) = 17.42$; $p < .0001$. There were no differences by program assignment.

There was a significant Group by Occasion interaction in the number of non-drug-related, non-suspendable disciplines. There was no change in the number of incidents from pretest to posttest for the Experimental Group; the number of incidents decreased from pretest to posttest among the Control group, $F(1,146) = 4.49$; $p < .0357$. However, this difference may also not be practically significant since the mean number of incidents for the Experimental Group was essentially zero. There were no significant differences by Program or Age.

Overall Negative School Behaviors. There was a significant Group by Occasion effect (See Figure 4) and a Program by Occasion effect in the number of days suspended for any reason. There was no significant change in the number of days suspended for the Control Group; the number of days suspended dropped significantly for the Experimental Group, $F(1,144) = 4.14$; $p < .0436$. Similarly, there was not a significant change in the number of days suspended for the EIP Group while the number of days suspended for the

Intermediate Group dropped significantly from pretest to posttest, $F(1,144) = 5.20$; $p < .0240$. There was no significant difference by Age.

Insert Figure 4 About Here

There was a significant Group by Occasion effect in the overall number of suspensions (See Figure 5). The number of incidents decreased significantly from pretest to posttest for both experimental group; the drop for the Experimental group was significantly larger, $F(1,146) = 5.75$; $p < .0178$. In addition, there were also significant differences by Occasion and Age. The number of incidents went down from pretest to posttest 1, $F(1,146) = 80.90$; $p < .0001$. And, as age increased, the number of reported suspensions decreased, $F(1,145) = 9.74$; $p < .0022$. There were no significant differences by program assignment.

Insert Figure 5 About Here

There was a significant Group by Occasion interaction in the number of non-suspendable disciplines. There was no change in the number of incidents from pretest to posttest for the Experimental Group; the number of incidents decreased from pretest to posttest among the Control group, $F(1,146) = 5.30$; $p < .0227$. However, this difference may not be practically significant since the mean number of incidents at pretest and posttest 1 for the Experimental Group was essentially zero. In addition, there was an overall significant difference by Occasion; the number of incidents decreased from pretest to posttest, $F(1,146) = 4.32$; $p < .0394$. There were no differences by Program or Age.

School Policy Effect Results

Data from the Urban Experimental school systems were used to represent the three different school disciplinary policies⁴. All three occasions of data were utilized. Analysis of pretest data indicated that there

were no initial differences by school policy in the school data. Differences by occasion, school policy, occasion crossed with school policy, and age of teen were then assessed. Data were not standardized for this analyses since there were no significant differences between participant groups at pretest.

Drug-Related Behaviors. There was a significant school policy effect in the number of drug-related suspensions, disciplines, plus expulsions (See Figure 6), $X^2(df=4) = 11.29$; $p < .023$. All three school systems had a significant reduction in the total number of incidents from pretest to posttest 1. The school systems with the strictest and the most lenient policies reported a larger initial reduction in incidents. The Strict policy school system then maintained that reduction to posttest 2 while the incidence increased slightly for the other two school systems. In addition, there was a significant main effect for occasion, $X^2(df=2) = 160.56$; $p < .001$, indicating that the largest decrease in the number of incidents occurred between pretest and first posttest, with a slight, albeit significant, increase from first to second posttest. There were no significant differences by age or overall policy in these school districts.

Insert Figure 6 About Here

There was a significant school policy effect in the number of drug-related suspensions (See Figure 7), $X^2(df=4) = 10.12$; $p < .039$. All three school systems showed a significant reduction in the total number of incidents from pretest to posttest 1. The school systems with the strictest and the most lenient policies reported a larger initial reduction in incidents. The Strict policy school system then maintained that reduction to posttest 2 while the incidence increased slightly for the other two school systems. In addition, there was a significant main effect for occasion, $X^2(df=2) = 194.87$; $p < .001$, indicating that the largest decrease in the number of incidents occurred between pretest and first posttest, with a slight, albeit significant, increase from first to second posttest. There were no significant differences by age or overall policy in these school districts.

Insert Figure 7 About Here

Discussion

Program Effectiveness

The GAIN program was most effective in reducing school-reported disciplinary problems. Positive changes that occurred as a result of participation in the program included reductions in the following:

1. the proportion of days absent during the school grading period.
2. the total number of drug-related problems at school.
3. the number of drug-related suspensions.
4. the overall number of suspensions (both drug- and non-drug-related) at school.
5. the number of days suspended.

There were some areas in which no program-related change occurred. First, non-drug-related school problems did not decrease; however, the average incidence among the Experimental participants was essentially 0 at pretest, so this finding may be irrelevant. Second, there was no change in grade point average as a result of participation in the program.

Finally, there were no significant Group by Program differences over time. This finding is indicative of the general effectiveness of both EIP and Intermediate programs when coupled with the clinical assessment. That is, initial assessment placed teens and their parents into the appropriate program. The Intermediate intervention program then met the needs of its participants while the EIP prevention program met the needs of its participants. A differential effect would have meant that one group was not meeting its goals. This, fortunately, did not occur.

Urban School Policy Effects

Does a difference in school disciplinary policy affect the effectiveness of the GAIN program? The answer is not a simple one. In some instances, the program was equally effective regardless of policy. In other instances, the program was even more effective when a school system had one school policy rather than another. In other instances, the program did not have an effect, but having one school policy rather than another was effective. The three school systems and their three policies were assessed. Their varying outcomes are discussed below.

First, the program is equally effective in producing positive change regardless of school policy. This holds true for both school attendance and for number of days suspended. As a result of participating in the GAIN program, but regardless of school policy, school attendance increased and number of days suspended decreased.

Second, there were two instances where the program was even more effective with a strict school disciplinary policy. In the schools with the partial waiver suspension policy and the mandatory suspension policy with threat of expulsion (the Strict policy), administrators reported a greater decrease in drug-related school problems and in drug-related suspensions. The Strict policy system maintained that decrease to second posttest while the other two systems had slight increases at this point. It should be noted that all three school system policies were effective in reducing drug-related school problems; the Strict policy just did a slightly better job, with the Lenient policy coming in as a very close second.

Summary

These mixed results indicate two things. First, a drug-related disciplinary school policy used in conjunction with a family-focused drug-education program, such as *GAIN*, is useful in reducing drug-related problems at school. Schools might therefore consider implementing a drug-related policy associated with a drug-education program if they do not already have one. Second, school policies may have differing effects depending on what outcome you are looking at. No one policy appears to do a better job overall. No recommendation advocating one policy over another can therefore be made.

Endnotes

1. Formerly Project Director, Getting Alternative Information Now, Family Service Agency of Central Arkansas, North Little Rock, AR.
2. Although attitudinal data were collected, only the profile data and school data were used for this presentation.
3. For purposes of clarity in this paper, differences by Experimental and Control groups will be noted as "Group" differences; differences by Program Assignment (i.e., EIP vs. Intermediate programs) will be noted as "Program" differences.
4. The Control data were excluded from these analyses since a large number of these students entered into the program late. Data for a third grading period were therefore unavailable.

Proportion of Days Absent from School During Grading Period--Urban Sample

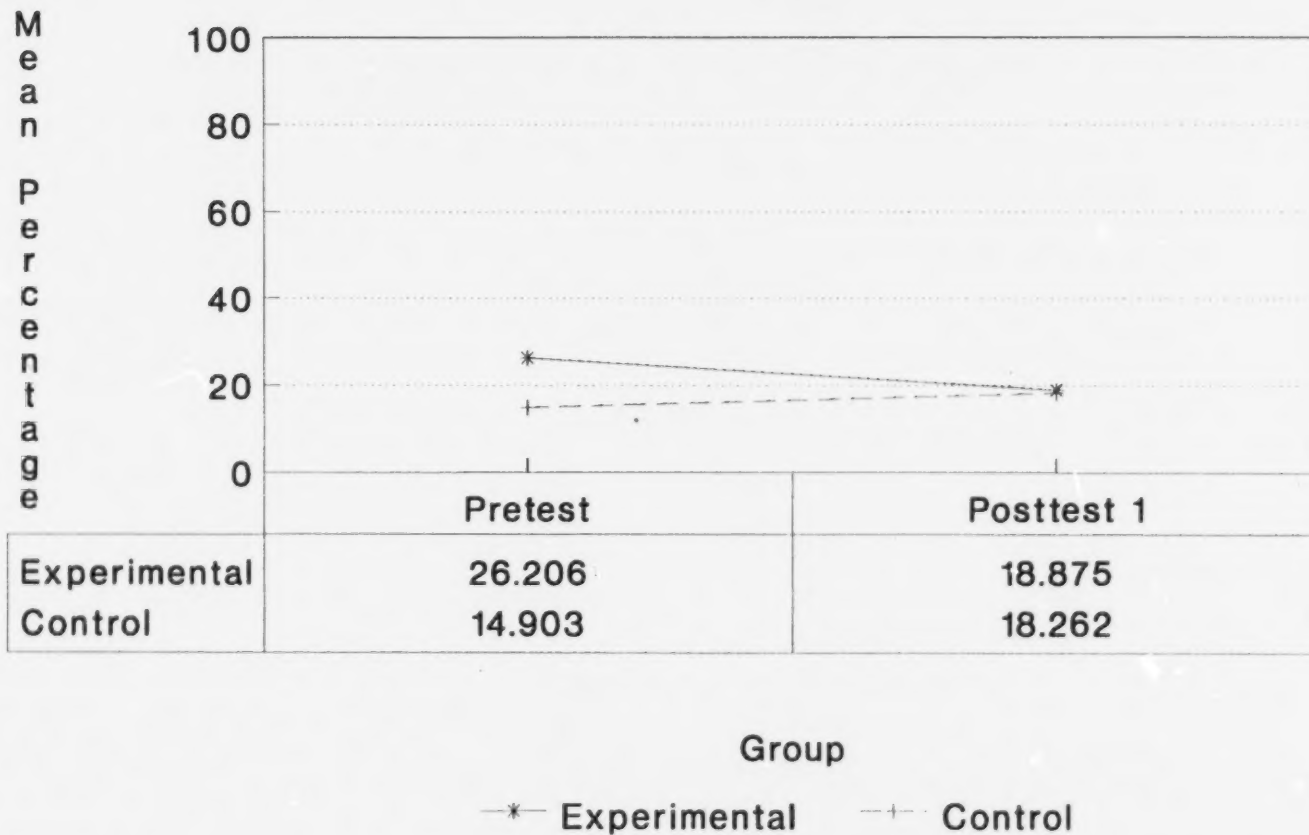


Figure 1.

Number of Drug-Related Suspensions, Disciplines, and Expulsions--Urban Sample

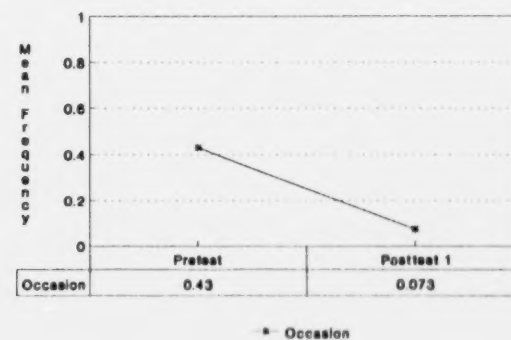
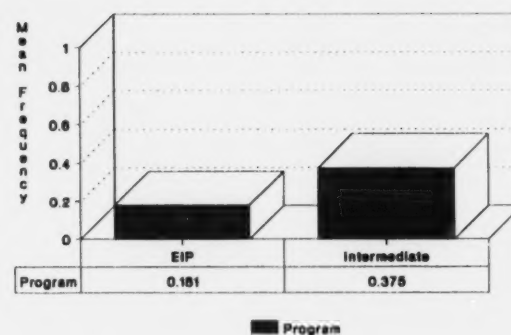
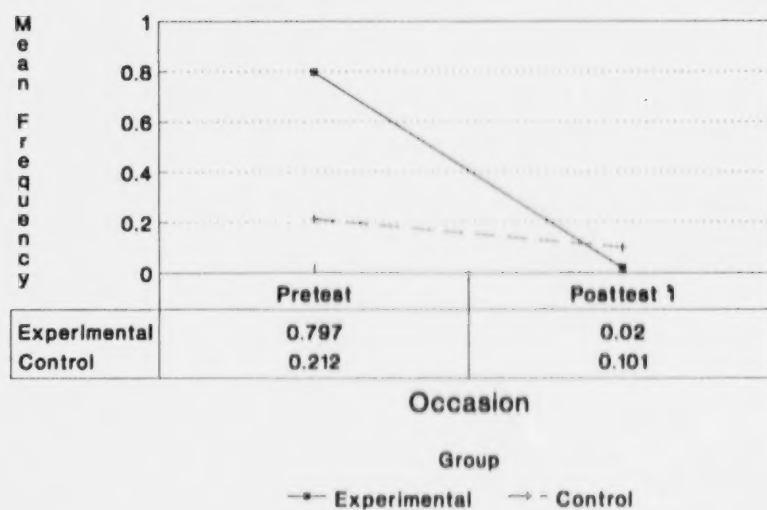
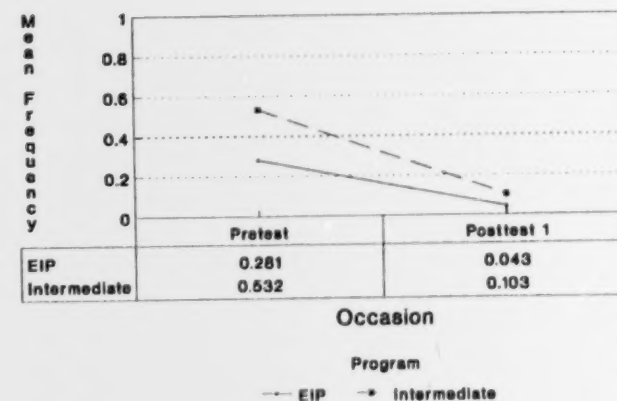
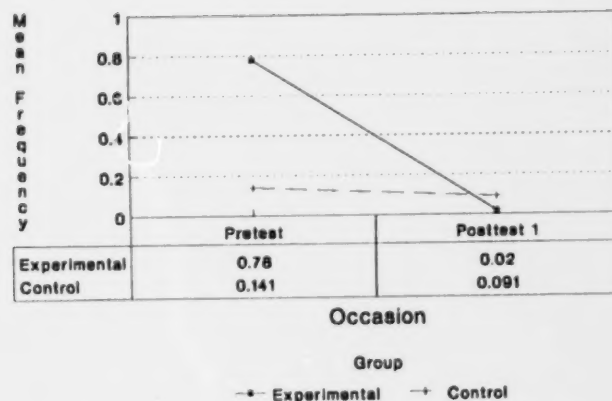


Figure 2.



Number of Drug-Related Suspensions--Urban Sample

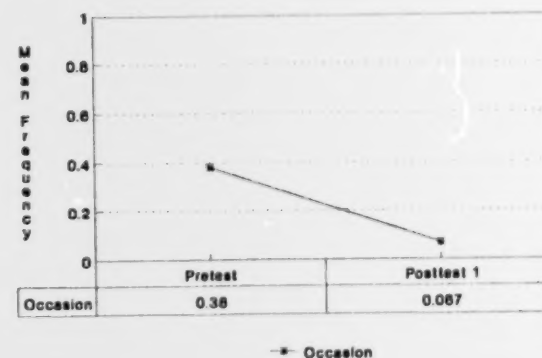
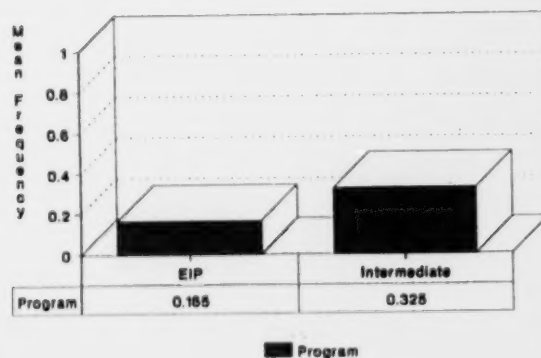
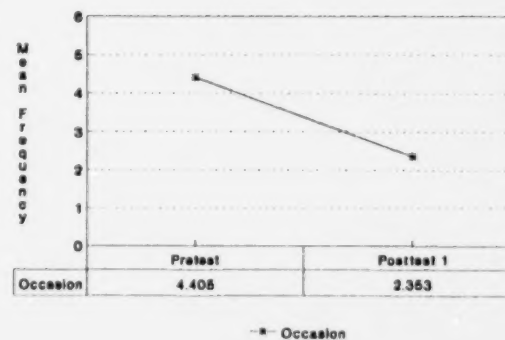
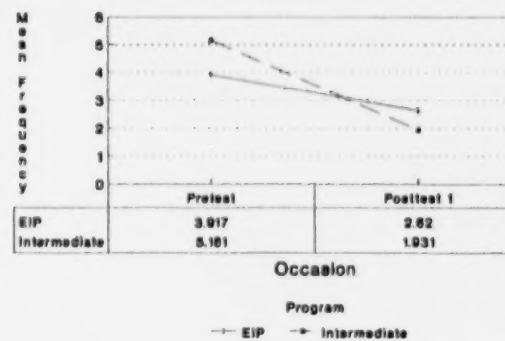
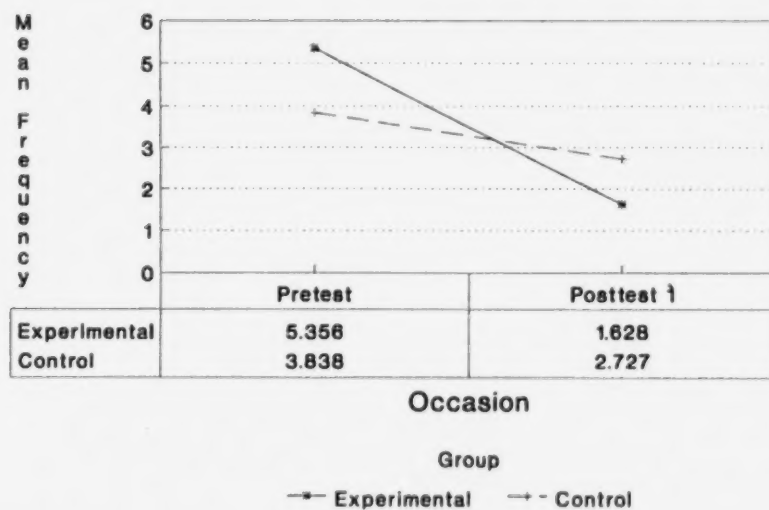
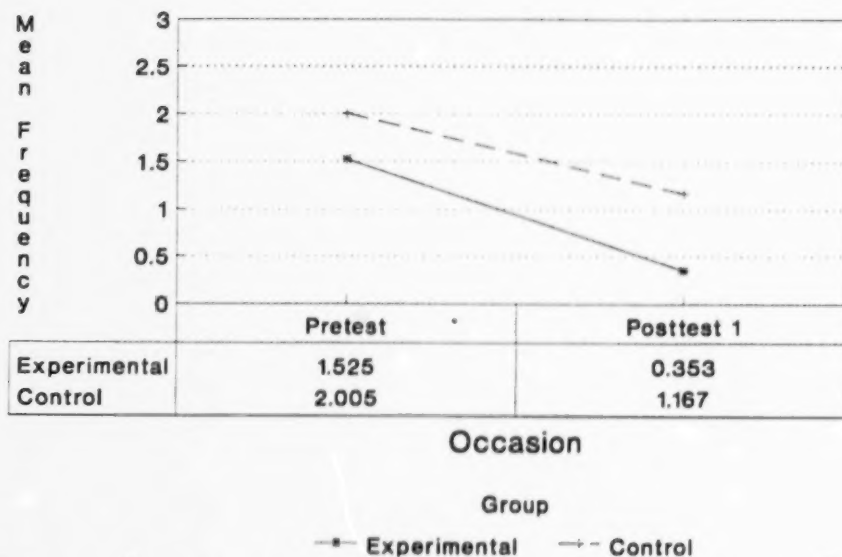


Figure 3.

Number of Days Suspended for Any Reason Urban Sample



21
Figure 4.



Number of Times Suspended for any Reason Urban Sample

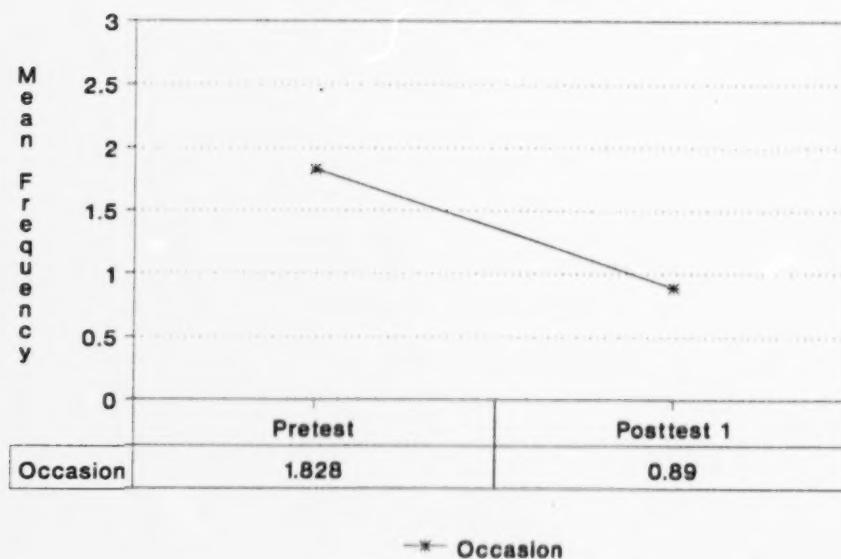
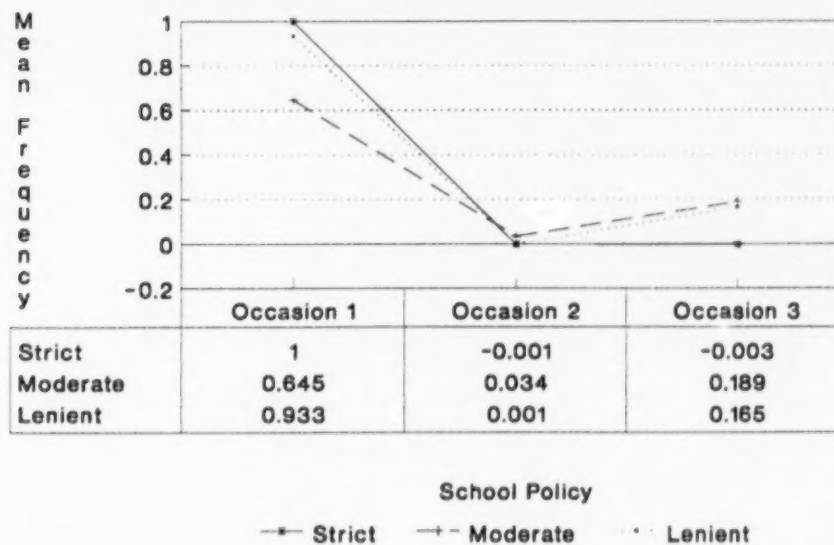
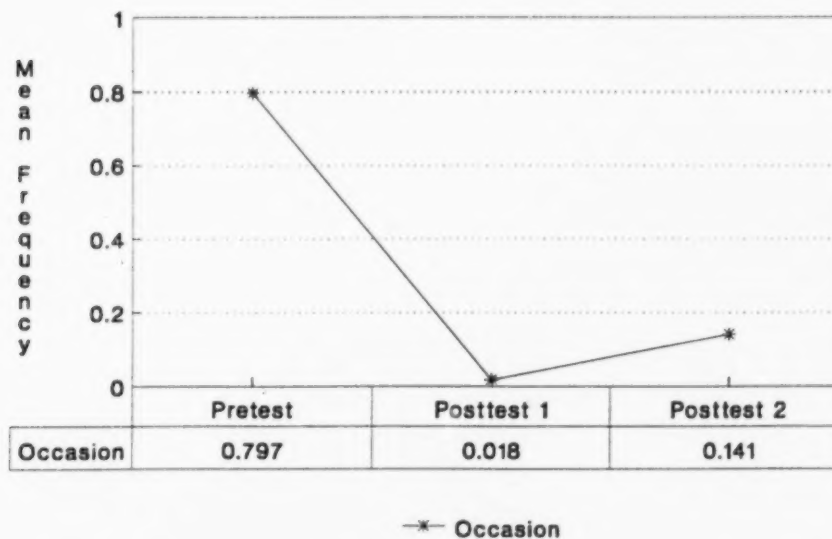


Figure 5.

School Policy Effects



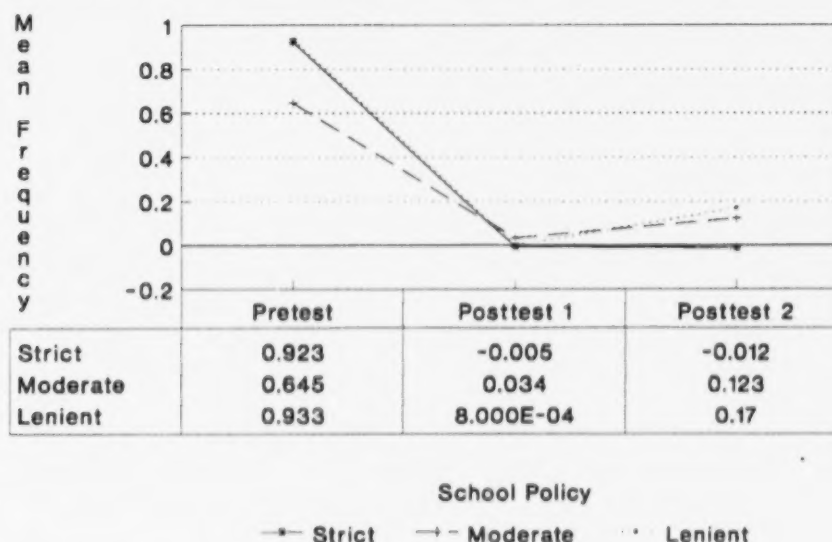
Number of Drug-Related Suspensions, Disciplines, and Expulsions—Urban Experimental Sample



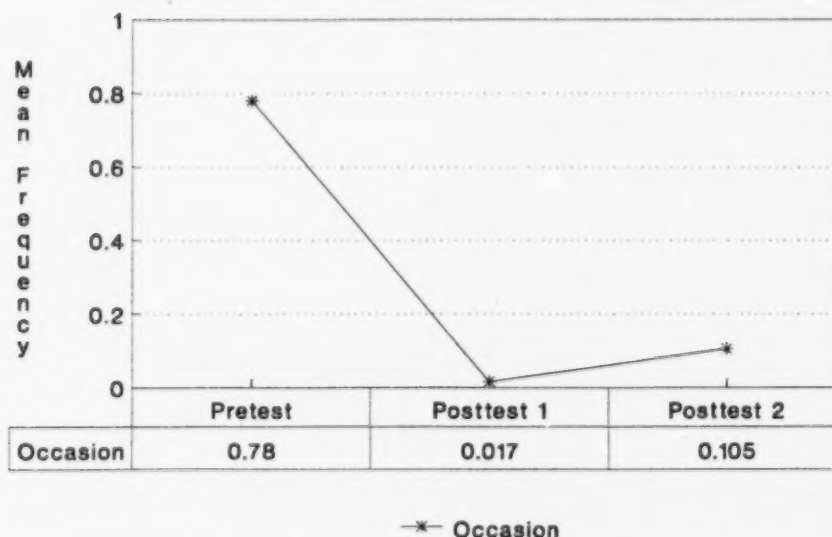
Note: Missing data were estimated

Figure 6.

Number of Drug-Related Suspensions



Urban Experimental Sample School Policy Effects



Note: Missing data were estimated.

Figure 7.